PCEngine GAMER

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REVIEWED

JUMP & SHOOT
モンスター・レアー
MONSTER LAIR
THAT BOY'S A WONDER

PLUS

OILY BARBARIAN

ラスタンサーガII

RASTAN SAGA II

KILL ME, KILL ME NOW

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gine GAMER

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As I sit here picking strange spongy black things out from under my toe-nails (what the hell are they?), I can't help but wonder where the time has gone.

The New Year is well underway and the new issue is finally here. Aside from a few licks of paint here and there, this month also sees the first game to be given our very own OBEY award - reserved for those PC Engine games that are considered an essential part of everyone's collection.

This year has also provided me with the opportunity to draw graphics for a real honest-to-goodness PC Engine game. As well as some minor work on Mysterious 'will it ever be released' Song, I'm also hard at it creating stuff for Aetherbyte's Retrocade collection. These are truly exciting times.

sunteam_paul

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Earthworms have 5 hearts.

Monster Lair

Poor Tom-Tom. He's already rescued his girl and saved the land from the evil Meka Dragon, and he's just sat down for five minutes hoping to get a cup of tea and a bit of a kip, when invaders from across the galaxy appear and pinch a load of legendary weapons and armour. In fact, he's so put out by all this, he changes his name to Leo, dyes his hair bright green and sets out to knock seven shades of Deep Blue out of these little scumbags that are about as welcome as a dose of clap. And to make things worse, all these years of running around naked in the jungle and he STILL can't get a decent tan.

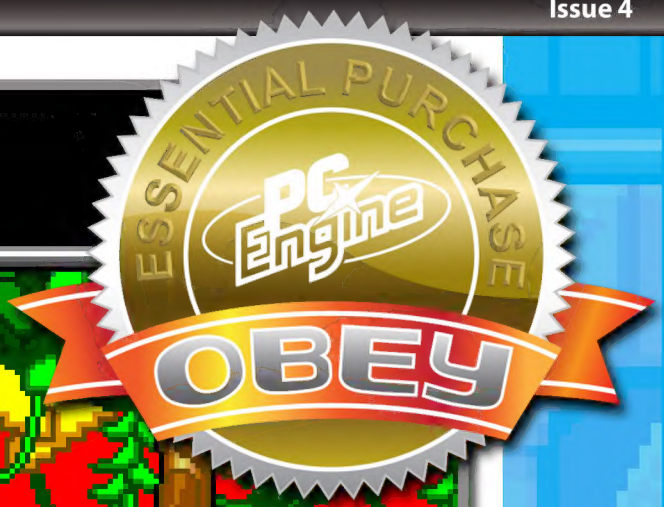
From the very first second, you can tell that Leo really means business - after all he's running...all the time. There's no standing around to take stock of your surroundings or plan a viable strategy for success, this sucker is full-on auto-scroll at all times so you need to keep on your toes and focus on what you're doing instead of tickling the dog and munching a biscuit as you play. Believe me, it doesn't work.

And if that's not enough to raise the tension, the good old original Wonder Boy style health system has been slotted neatly back in place, so you'll need to collect lots and lots of fruit to stop your life being sucked

Watch out for ice; you'll slip around like an oiled baby in a non-stick pan.

Don't venture too close or you'll get a taste of his huge fiery balls.

Wonder Boy III: Monster Lair ©1989 Hudson Soft/Alfa System ©1988 Westone



away faster than marriage and children ever could.

Now this wouldn't be too fair if you were given the same old offensive tools. Throwing small hatchets or gently poking critters with your tiny sword won't cut the mustard here. No, this time Leo has far more power as at the very least his sword shoots out cannon ball sized projectiles that maim anything that dares to get in their way.

Naturally, as in pretty much every video game ever invented, there are power ups, but Monster Lair has a weapon system that I like so much I'm very tempted to cook it dinner one evening.

You see, in many games you tend to find the 'best' weapon and stick with it, never picking the less effective ones or the complete duffer (for there is always one). But

the designers have thrown a wet fish in the spokes of that particular bicycle, as each weapon you pick up is only effective for a limited time before you resort to old faithful pea shooter again. Thankfully, weapons drop in abundance and you're never at a loose end for something to collect (they also raise your health so are a viable alternative if fresh fruit seems to be lacking). The upgrades themselves are varied enough, forcing you to alter your strategy on the fly depending on what you end up with.

Here's a bit of a rundown on what to expect:

Spiral - this sends multiple flying blades around you in a circle. It's only good for short range, but can come in handy as protection on blind jumps or if you want to push ahead fast.

Wide Ring - A spread of rings shoots from your sword. Best used at great distance to mop up multiple enemies, or on bosses that throw many tiny things at you.

Beam - A narrow beam weapon, it's powerful but you have to be accurate to get the results.

Fireball - A nice one to get you out of close shaves, this shoots fireballs forward and behind you, relieving you from those times where you are attacked from both sides.

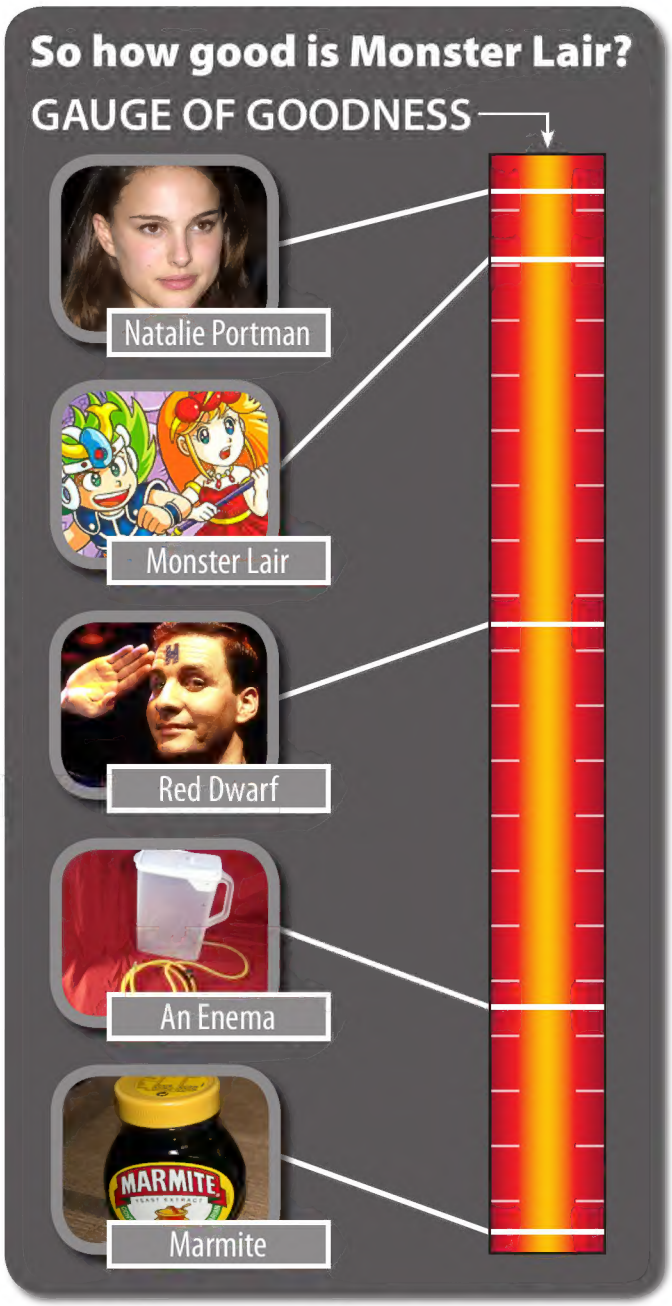
Missile - One of the best weapons to get, this shoots missiles with massive explosive potential. If you keep your finger on the button, they will zoom off until they hit, but if you don't then these form an offensive and powerful barrage in front of you. The must-have weapon for bosses.

Big Fire - A rare drop, and that's no surprise, as this shoots huge swirling balls of fire that devastate anything in their wake. Awesome.

That's not all though dear reader, for when you are done with a level of frantic platform hopping, the second half of every level has you riding a stylish pink dragon in a traditional shoot 'em up scenario. Admittedly, these stages are more a warm-up for the approaching nasty boss creature, but they are a welcome diversion nonetheless.

The bosses are quite a highlight in Monster Lair. They are all very well designed and most are memorable encounters from the R-Type style snake to the fruit machine mushroom. This is, however, where one of Monster Lair's few flaws is apparent, as some of the bosses (particularly the later ones) are disproportionately challenging compared to the levels themselves, meaning that you will drop a good many lives if you're unlucky enough to have the wrong (or no) weapon.

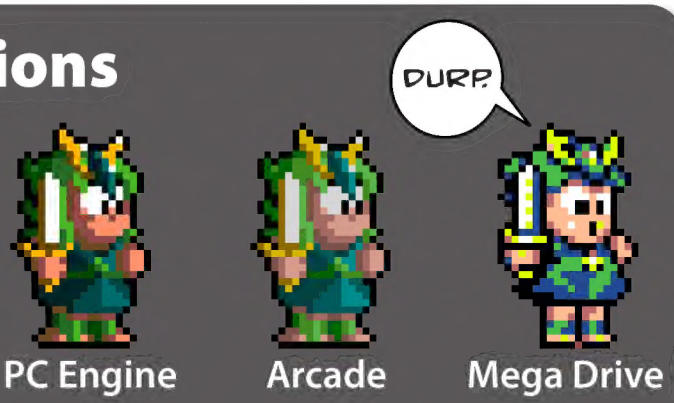
But that's just a minor niggle, because the game itself is more fun that watching a chimp's tea party that is going horribly wrong before your eyes. Monster Lair is just pure arcadey goodness, and I find myself not caring a jot whether I can finish the game (which I quite definitely can't) because I just enjoy the playing so much. It's fast moving, great reflex platforming that (aside from a few bosses) never feels like it's cheating you into dying unfairly - the finger is always pointed back at your ineptitude, so you only have yourself to blame.



Red Dwarf © BBC, Marmite is a trademark of Unilever UK Limited, Natalie Portman is hot

Conversion Connections

Barring some minor cosmetic changes (and I'm not talking botox or boob-job), Wonder Boy II was a pretty damn accurate conversion on the PC Engine, and Monster Lair continues this trend.



Aside from the obvious limitations with parallax scrolling and the modifications to the palette, Monster Lair is an almost carbon copy of the arcade original. The life panel is a touch different and some animation is missing, but sound effects are so close as to be almost identical. In fact, the programmers at Sega were so blown away by the awesome power of the PC Engine version that when they came to convert it to the Mega Drive, they just gave up trying.

Visually, it's just as good a representation of the arcade as you could ever have hoped for. The designs are appealing and the scenery, while simple and cute, suits the game perfectly. The visuals get a little less exciting in the later stages, but generally there's always something nice to look at.

One of the major selling points for me is the sound. Glossing over the fact that the sound effects are just about spot-on arcade perfect, the music is where this game truly shines.

Some people have commented that this game didn't have a reason to be on CD. To them I say 'pish and tish' (or I would if still living in the middle ages). I maintain that there's no reason for it *not* to be on CD, and the utterly superb soundtrack,

arranged to perfection, does an awful lot for the atmosphere and enjoyment of the game. This was one of the early CD-Rom games, and was certainly one of the 'killer apps' for me, as I'm sure it was for others.

And one final thing that puts the final icing on the cake - Monster Lair has simultaneous two player gameplay. If I had any friends I'm sure it would be super fun.

In conclusion, Monster Lair is like the After Burner of platform games. It's simple, ideal to be played in short bursts, and is just ultimately full of good, honest

videogameyness that makes is a joy to play. And be assured that it will be a game that you will come back to, and enjoy, far into the future when most other titles are forgotten. **SP**

THE OVERLY COMPLICATED SCORING SYSTEM

GRAPHICS

Almost arcade perfect, cute and appealing and all superbly designed and memorable.

BALANCE

Perhaps too hard to complete for many, but a well balanced and graded difficulty.

SOUND EFFECTS

Top quality arcade sound effects add greatly to the game if you know the original.

MUSIC

Some of the most awesome music on CD-Rom. The arrangements are perfect!

PLAYABILITY

Great control with no issues make this a pleasure to play - it just feels so natural.

ADDICTIVENESS

You'll play this in bursts rather than long sessions - but you will always come back for more.

STAR QUALITY

TOTAL SCORE

927

/1000

GRAPH OF PREDICTED INTEREST

MAKER: HUDSON SOFT • **YEAR:** 1989 • **FORMAT:** CD-ROM

Blackadder II ©1986 BBC

Newstopia

Yesterday's News Today

The Bees are Disappearing

According to reports that everyone has read by now, Hudson Entertainment (the American one that isn't the *real* Hudson Soft) has been given a swift axe to the neck by their powerful overlords, Konami.

Konami has fully acquired Hudson Soft after getting it really drunk at a party once and taking some rather embarrassing photos.

Staff at Hudson Entertainment didn't tell me, "At last. We've been kept locked in the stationery cupboard for months with only scraps of chicken skin and toner for sustenance."

This turn of events has cast doubt on whether the new PC Genjin title for Xbox, Wii and PlayStation 3 will get a release outside of Japan, which has caused a great deal of relief among fans of the series.

When I failed to approach Konami's CEO, he quite definitely didn't say, "This will be a day long remembered. It has seen the end of Kenobi, it will soon see the end of the rebellion."

Kato & Ken Observed in Historical Photograph

Spot the Difference

Below are two screenshots from the PC Engine. How many differences do you think you can spot?

A B

Answer: 5744

Kato Chan & Ken Chan ©1987 Hudson Soft, PC Genjin 2 ©1990 Hudson Soft/Red, Gate of Thunder ©1992 Hudson Soft/Red

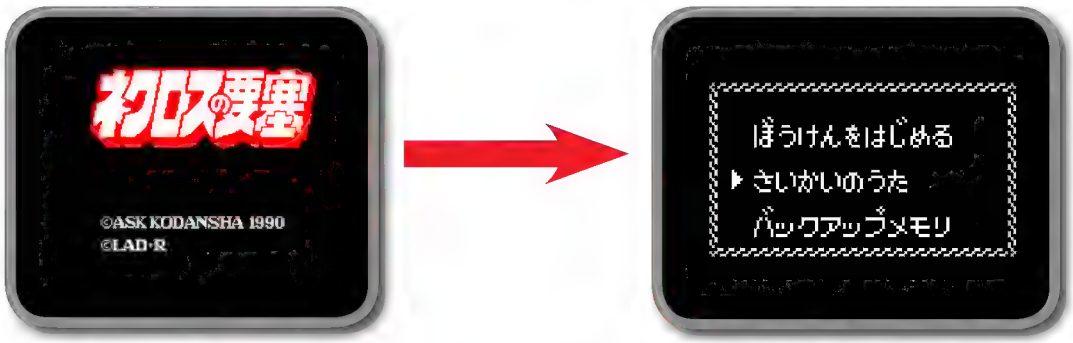
Fish & Tips

Hints and cheats to help you stay ahead of the pack

Necross no Yōsai: Debug Mode

Fed up trying to wade through reams of Japanese text to play the game? Then why not take a moment away to listen to the music or watch one of the animated sequences with this handy little tip.

1. Navigate to the password screen (it's the middle one)



2. Type in the following password (get a Japanese person to help you if you have trouble deciphering the characters)

3. Enjoy all the sound effects and music, or browse through hundreds of animated scenes (I got bored just after number 700).

Rastan Saga II

Once in a while, something truly remarkable happens. A development team manages to take all their experience and skill and somehow, magically combine them, resulting in a product that achieves results that you couldn't have expected in your wildest imaginings. Well folks, Rastan Saga II is such a game.

But before we get into the nitty gritty, let's take a look at what makes this the truly unique experience it is.

The original Rastan Saga was released in the arcades in 1987 by Taito. It was well received, with its Conan-like fantasy setting, challenging platforming action

Holes can be tricky to spot, especially with the chunky backgrounds

The brave warrior sets out on his quest, then realises in horror that he forgot to get dressed this morning.

Rastan Saga II ©1990 Taito

Wallop these blocks to clear a path. It's kinda like barbarian Tetris.

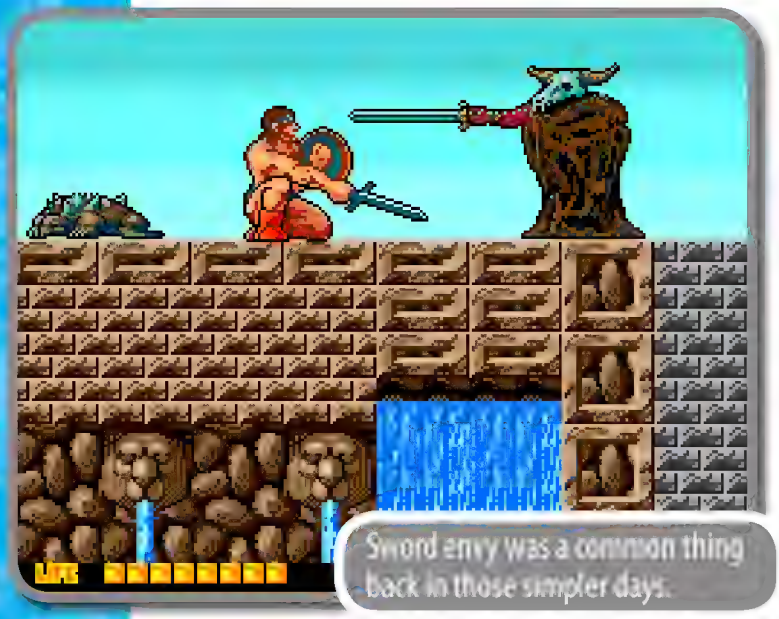
The medieval version of elevators, these pillars shift up and down.

and exceptional soundtrack. So therefore, a sequel was inevitable, which followed in 1988. Of course, this goldmine of a franchise was primed just in time for the PC Engine, and Taito in their wisdom chose to bypass the first Rastan (which after all was a whole year older than the sequel, and therefore logically it was surely a year rubbisher) and go straight on to convert number two.

While Rastan Saga II is quite different in practice, on paper it sounds like more of the same. The (frankly unimportant) story revolves around the land of Rastania, which was a rather sacred holiday spot containing a temple called "Skyscraper", control of which would bestow the new owner with rule of the aforementioned land. While this seems a somewhat questionable governmental policy, there it is. And naturally some bright spark has twigged that it might be advantageous to give it a bash, so has rounded up a whole army of otherworldly minions to invade the temple and generally beat people up a bit.

Downwards pointy sword action is handy, but not always effective.

Now this mysterious "wicked group" started to get on people's wicks, so a courageous young man has risen in revolt against them, while everyone else is probably still watching the telly.



And so you take control of this young hero, a man whose bulging muscles and stylish red boots you could only dream of having. Progressing through the various landscapes, defeating monsters sometimes gives the opportunity to alter your weaponry. You begin with a rudimentary short sword and shield (which can be raised above your head to avoid falling blocks) but also available are such classics and the 'bloody great big sword' and 'a pair of claw gloves so you can pretend you're that dude from those X-Men films.' There are also other little bonuses like the ability to expel a powerful electric charge from your current weapon, which can really cause some nasty burns.

Naturally, after a few sub-stages in each level, you are thrown (or more accurately, you leap) into an arena with a particularly angry beastie that wants nothing more than to lop your head off for sport. Dispatch him or her (or it) and it's back to a bit more running, jumping, swinging on ropes and general all-round barbarian frivolity. What could possibly be wrong with that?

Well.

When I approached this game to review, I promised myself that I would take a more positive outlook than people might expect. My opening paragraph, for example, is essentially true. It takes a great

deal of skill for a development team to produce a title which, given its heritage and no-brainer money-making possibilities, manages to propel the player into new and quite amazing realms of complete apathy that they have never before experienced.

They have succeeded superbly in creating a sequel which not only disinterests me in ways I had never known, but also manages to take a dump on its classic prequel with such skill it is to be admired.

But let's remain positive. What makes Rastan Saga II so great at unentertaining me? Could it be the impressively large sprites that work absolute wonders in cramping the gameplay and proving that bigger is not always better? Or could it be the stunningly twee soundtrack

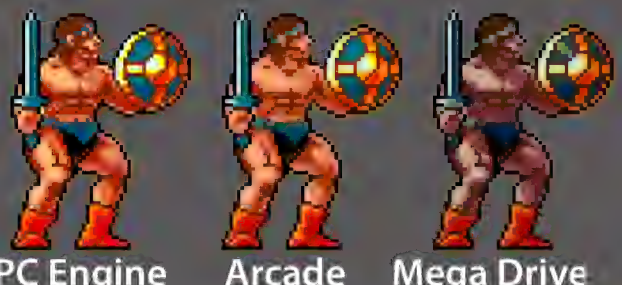
Conversion Connections

It's all very well reviewing the game 'as is', but how does it compare as an arcade conversion?

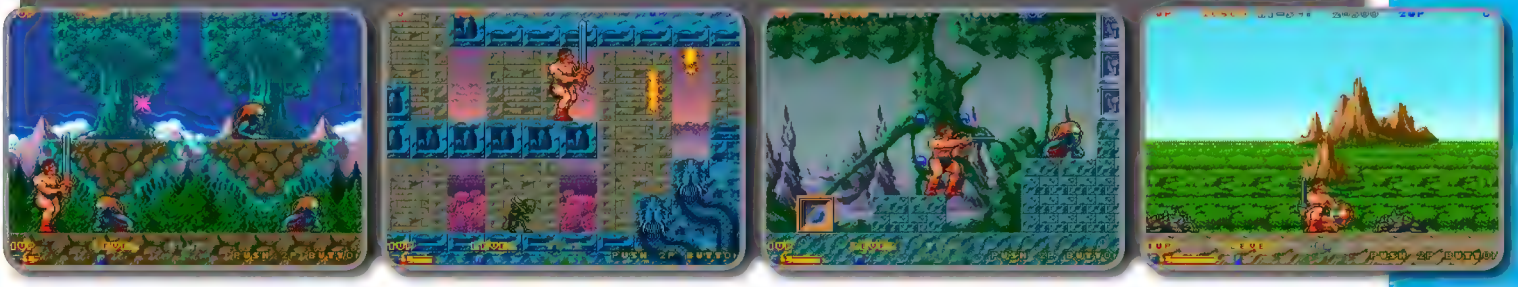
Surprisingly, it is mostly very accurate. The sprites are spot on, save a few frames of animation that had to be dropped. Colours are accurate - the PC Engine has a slightly more vibrant and contrasty palette, so it's not as subtle in places. The backgrounds are also generally pretty good, although the main failing is a lack of parallax scrolling which results in a much blockier looking game. Some background details (like trees) are missing, but on the whole it fares very well.

The gameplay is much faster in the arcade version, although the jumping seems to have a delay which the PC Engine version doesn't suffer from. Levels also scroll continuously and don't have the somewhat jarring fade out that just feels odd.

The tunes are the same, but the arcade music is both faster and uses far more appropriate sounds. It's a lot more heroic, which does make a difference to how the game feels, but still doesn't save it from itself.



PC Engine Arcade Mega Drive

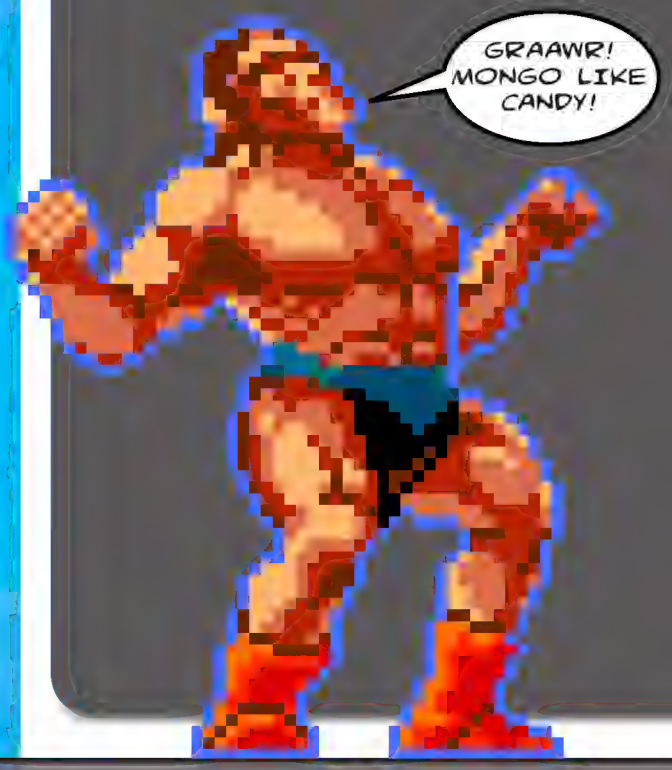


Bosses are not massively strategic, but some of them *are* just massive.

The Bad, the Good and the Ugly

There's a lot of things wrong with Rastan Saga II, so here's a quick rundown:

- Everything is too big, making the gameplay area feel cramped.
- Walking is frustratingly slow, making you want to jump everywhere because it's faster.
- Rushing the game by jumping everywhere is a sure way to die, making you walk frustratingly slowly (see above).
- Enemies can often hit you before you have a fair chance to hit them.
- Some jumps are just cheap and unfair.
- Despite the big sprites and closeness to the arcade, somehow it still looks a bit naff.
- If the bosses require any strategy other than bashing them while being killed, I'm not interested enough to work it out.



In balance, here are some good points:

- You get used to the badness after a while.
- It's a fairly decent conversion.
- Unlike Mahjong games, at least it's somewhat playable.

Here's the ugly:

- You are.

that sounds more like something my granny would knit to than the theme of blood soaked barbarian action?

Well, it's all these things and more. Control is horrible, collision is often unfair and frustrating, and the whole package just feels so strangely bland and unexciting that you'd rather be off playing Deep Blue...really.

And the fact that if one tiny management decision was made a little differently, we just might have had the original Rastan Saga on the PC Engine, and that just makes this as hard to swallow as one of those

horrible pickled plums you get in Japanese rice balls. You know the ones. They make you gag.

Take my advice. If you ever get your hands on this HuCARD, flush it like a morning turd. **SP**

THE OVERLY COMPLICATED SCORING SYSTEM

GRAPHICS

Big, accurate sprites and backgrounds, but it just looks like a bit of a mess at times.

BALANCE

The game is well balanced, getting gradually more challenging as you progress.

SOUND EFFECTS

The white noise effects are adequate but can start to grate after a while.

MUSIC

The tinkly, weedy sound is inappropriate and the tunes aren't memorable.

PLAYABILITY

Hampered by little annoyances and frustrations, these take a lot of the fun out of the game.

ADDICTIVENESS

Aside from the basic urge to see the next level, you just feel it's not worth the effort.

STAR QUALITY

TOTAL SCORE

431

/1000

GRAPH OF PREDICTED INTEREST

MAKER: TAITO • **YEAR:** 1990 • **FORMAT:** HUCARD

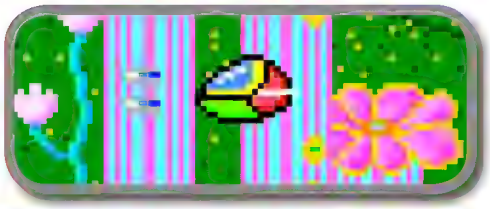
Top Banana

A fight to the death... but who will win?

TYRIS FLARE
GOLDEN AXE

VS

OPA OPA
FANTASY ZONE



ROUND 1 : WEAPONRY — WIN

Her sword may be lame, but her magical ability to summon volcanoes, walls of flame and giant fire breathing dragons are enough to give even the hardest enemy the squits.

He might look harmless...until destructive lasers stream from his body to shred all foes around him. He also drops Monty Python style 16-ton weights, so that's an instant win.

WIN — ROUND 2 : TOUGHNESS

Anyone can take on an army of henchmen these days and not break a sweat, but to do it in just a small red bikini and boots really shows what this gal is made of.

Not only does Opa Opa hide behind his arsenal of high tech weapons, he also shatters into a million pieces at the slightest touch. Pretty, but what a wuss.

WIN — ROUND 3 : PHYSICAL PROWESS

Tyris is truly at the peak of physical perfection. She runs, leaps, kicks, stabs and never shows any signs of fatigue. If it wasn't for those ugly girl-muscles, she'd be almost perfect.

Poor Opa Opa can get a good sprint going, but quickly tires out and has to fire up his engines if he wants to get his daily quota of alien murder filled. Get back to the gym, my little egg friend.

WIN — ROUND 4 : INTIMIDATION FACTOR

Let's face it. Anyone would be intimidated by someone waving a sword casually at their face. Add to that the fact that Tyris is a woman, and that's plain terrifying.

Opa Opa is about as intimidating as a well painted Easter egg in an Easter egg painting competition. The only way he'd be less threatening is if he was wearing pink Uggs.

ROUND 5 : MOST FUN AT PARTIES — WIN

You might think a hottie like Tyris would go down a treat, but even in a ball gown she has the physique of Schwarzenegger and if drunk, she could burn the place down with her magic.

Opa Opa is a boon at parties. You can get him to give rides to the kids, and if he cracks open his cockpit he makes a great ice dispenser. If you get bored, you can also fry him.

OVERALL WINNER

TYRIS FLARE

Tyris may be bent on revenge, but is driven by a sense of justice. Her devotion to physical training and mastering the elemental magic of fire shows a true strength of character (or lack of anything better to do).

Golden Axe ©1990 Renovation/Telenet/Sega, Fantasy Zone ©1988 NEC Avenue/Sega

Dr. Bakuda's Happy Hour

Shown the error of his ways, Dr. Bakuda has turned his powers to good and wishes to spread joy and cheer to all around him.

Please note the opinions of Dr. Bakuda may not represent the opinions of the Editorial staff.

I was in my weekly anger management class the other day, drawing a nice picture of a kitten under a rainbow. It kind of reminded me of the wonderful old animated movies, nay *events*, that the Walt Disney company produced in my youth. It's such a lovely feeling of magic watching those movies that it brings you right back to your childhood.

I crapping hate Disney with every fibre in my body. They think they are the bloody be-all and end-all of animation. They've not produced a decent film in decades (and don't you dare count those extended merchandising adverts like Alladin and The Little Mermaid). They rip off other people's ideas (see: The Lion King) and what makes the bile rise in my throat the most is the way that bunch of uncreative jack-a-napes brand everything like they invented it. Oh, it's no longer DVD, it's 'Disney DVD'. It's not Blu-Ray, it's 'Disney Blu-Ray' because of course Disney invented everything, the pestiferous gecks.

And not only that, they are probably the only company that shoehorns about 45 minutes of eye-offending adverts for their excretable products on the start of their DVDs. It takes about 20 clicks of the skip button just to get to the damn menu! And worse than that, they have the utter gall to release a new feature called 'Fast Play'. Using fast play actually TAKES LONGER to get to the movie than just hitting 'menu'. Fast Play plays all the frigging adverts. What the hell is fast about that?

The only good thing about Disney is that they bought Pixar. Pixar is great. Pixar is NOT Disney in my eyes. Disney should be down on their knees, licking the boots of Pixar clean with its tongue. And Disney's link with Studio Ghibli is somewhat redeeming. And the Pirates of the Caribbean movies were good. Tron was also cool.

Actually, I really like Disney.

Gaming Tongue

The world of gaming is not confined to the PC Engine. **Joe Redifer** gives you a taste of whatever else is out there.

Ys: The Oath in Felghana

PSP • XSEED • 2010

Being that I actually purchased a PSP solely to play Ys Seven, I decided to get the other Ys games on the system as well and snapped this one up when it was released.

It is a remake of the fabulous Ys 3 and has existed on the PC and whatnot for years and years now, but we're not here for a history lesson. As a big fan of Ys 3, I was eager to blow through this one as I usually just plough through Ys 3 games, enjoying it all of the way. But lots of things were changed.

The new 3D look throws me off a bit, but it is still playable. There are lots of new items and even some new bosses. It is also much more difficult. I am simply unable to select a lower difficulty that "Normal" because I don't want to be beaten up by my friends, but honestly I think it might be a good idea to play this game on a lower difficulty level.

The music is outstanding and rearranged compared to the PCE-CD version. I won't say it is better but I will say it is equal or near-equal in most respects (the mountain theme isn't as good, but the volcano theme is better, etc). The stages are rather long-winded as the game tries to be more than it really is.

Suffice it to say I have fallen bored with the title and have yet to finish it. **JR**

Ys: The Oath in Felghana ©2010 Xseed/Falcom

Pilotwings

SUPER FAMICOM • NINTENDO • 1990

I first saw Pilotwings being displayed in a store on a Japanese Super Famicom many months before the SNES launched in the USA. I was mesmerized by the spinning and tilting playfield which was powered, in part, by the mighty DSP chip inside the cartridge as the full potential of the Super Famicom had already been reached before its first game was completed.

Over 20 years on and we still don't have personal jetpacks.

"I must have this!" I thought to myself, "But I needn't have it right this second". I didn't get the SNES right at launch due to lack of funds, but within a few months it was mine after I picked the console up at my local grocery store along with a TV dinner, some oranges and a bottle of shampoo.

Pilotwings is the ultimate leisurely game due in large part to its very

Aim for the cat, dude!

calm and relaxing music. You simply try to land correctly or fly through rings or whatnot. Amazingly you aren't called upon to stop some evil regime and save the entire universe. I also happened to think that one of the teachers in the game was quite cute. Hey, I was a teenager with ragin' hormones!

I don't know if I ever completed the game or not as it is not a game that demands such play. It is very casual. But I do know that the Nintendo 64 version, while good, had nothing on the SNES game. I plan to purchase and enjoy the upcoming 3DS but I am fairly confident that it will sour in comparison, but we'll see. **JR**

Space Harrier

ARCADE • SEGA • 1985

Just as much fun today as it ever was.

It was games like this one which helped me decide which would be the first gaming console I ever bought, the Sega Master System. I wasn't tremendously good at games back then, but I was impressed enough by this and other Sega games that my choice was clear. I was an arcade game lover and I felt Sega had the best arcade games, so the SMS was the console of choice for me.

It may look unique, but I had a dream like this just last night.

A bit after buying that console and beating the home version of Space Harrier, I began to get really good at the arcade version which featured slightly smoother graphics and a touch more colour than the home counterpart (though it is nearly impossible to tell the difference between the two versions if you stand 2 miles away). Sega really was ahead of their time in the arcades and Space Harrier was no exception with tons of colour, a crap-ton of scaling sprites and lots of objects all moving around very fast at a rock-solid 60 frames per second.

I used to impress onlookers as I zipped through Stage 14 "Asute", the fastest and most frenetic stage in the game, without dying. I simply loved this arcade game and still do. It has aged very well in my opinion. However I was disappointed that there was no final boss. The SMS version had a final boss called Haya-Oh which had awesome music, but the last boss in every other version of the game including the arcade is just a wimpy reappearance of Valda, the single-headed skeleton dragon. But that doesn't stop me from loving the arcade version.

Here's a tip for you which should work in ALL versions of this game: The harder you set the difficulty, the easier it actually is. **JR**

Space Harrier ©1985 Sega

Kangaroo

ARCADE • SUN ELECTRONICS • 1982

I used to play this game in the grocery store when I was a little kid while my mom did the shopping. I was pretty good at it and could even make it up to round 4. I was the envy of all the other kids in the neighbourhood.

PETA would have a fit over this game.

The premise is similar to Donkey Kong in that you play a completely useless and unmemorable character who needs to get to the top to rescue someone who is clearly more valuable to the enemy than you are. Why they are holding baby kangaroos as hostage is never explained in the game's story, but I am hoping that the monkeys plan to eat him or her.

You wander upwards jumping to hit fruit with your head. This serves no purpose other than to add points. Fruit was a very popular point accumulator back in old arcade games, it seems. You can also hit a bell which plays a little tune, but I never was able to figure out if it had any other purpose. Maybe it makes the monkeys stop throwing chewed-up apples at you for the time being. The game also features original BGM which is something that games at that time did not usually feature. It rocked hardcore as most music from Sunsoft games tend to. Yes, this company eventually became what is known as Sunsoft.

The controls are extremely stiff and are slow to react. This was perfect for me when I was a kid since I had no skill and I was an idiot. Now that I have massive skills and a brain faster than any CPU, the game does not respond fast enough for me and as a result it is much harder to play now than it was for me back then. When all is said and done, this game isn't as good as Blaster Master and there really is no excuse for that! **JR**

Is that monkey giving him the finger?

The Final Countdown

A definitive top 10 of PC Engine game features

Smart Bombs in Shoot 'em Ups

10. Raiden

Raiden's bomb is a bit rough round the edges, but the fact you are dropping it on some hillbilly's estate makes it all that more pleasurable. Take that farmer Bob, you toothless old hick!

9. Gate of Thunder

If the loud screeching sound doesn't cause a violent bowel movement in your enemies, the massive wall of fire racing towards them at high speed is sure to make them turn tail and run...at least until they burst into flames and die in screaming agony. It's the humane way to do it you know.

8. Final Soldier

Rather than some brutish fiery death bomb, this hippy weapon looks like a nice explosion of pretty flowers that tastefully spiral out from your ship, radiating peace and joy.

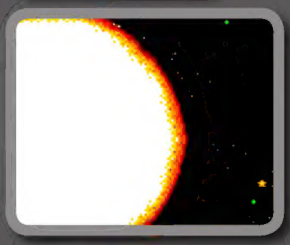
7. Star Parodier

A choice of weapons, depending on your character, each sensitively designed in boy and girl colours. The flying PC Engine shoots out big spinning globes, much like a bubblegum fart.

6. Cotton

Despite Cotton being a cute little girl, she can still make sith-like bolts of lightning shoot mercilessly from her fingertips, and do it without hammy overacting too.

Raiden ©1991 Hudson Soft/Seibu Kaihatsu, Gate of Thunder ©1992 Hudson Soft/Red, Final Soldier ©1991 Hudson Soft, Star Parodier ©1992 Hudson Soft/ Inter State/Kaneko, Cotton ©1993 Hudson Soft/Success

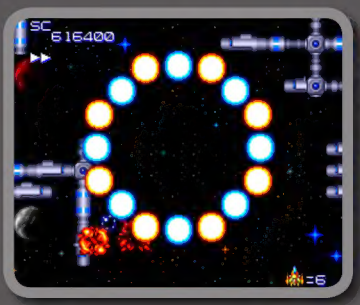


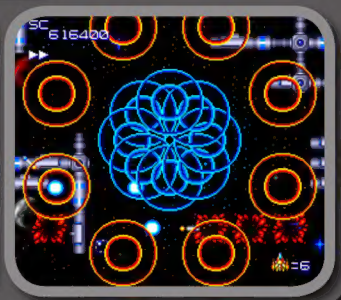
5. Parodius

As Forrest Gump proved, simple is sometimes more effective, and this slowly growing explosion looks great as it fills the screen and annihilates anything in its way, burning your retinas in the process.

4. Super Star Soldier

Space heroes of the future can take solace in the fact that the last thing that those evil alien children say before their death is something like, "Look Daddy, fireworks! Daddy? why is your face melting Daddy?"





3. Tatsujin

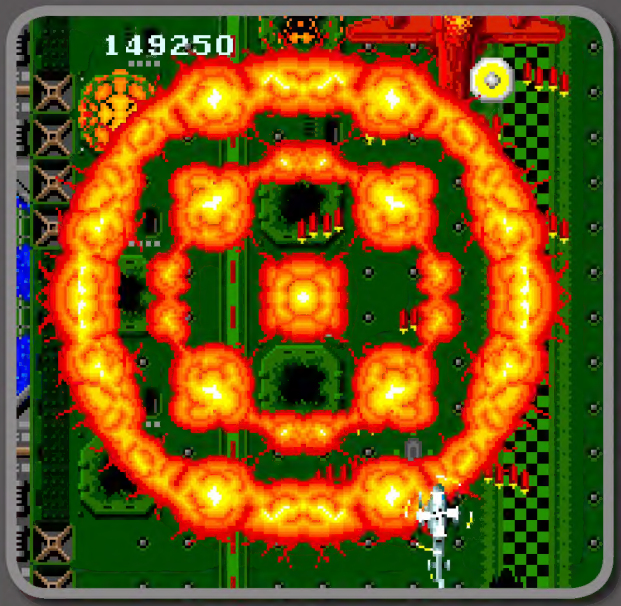
This game couldn't be harder if it took viagra, so you'll be needing plenty of these bombs to progress. Luckily they look both scary and wonderful and are one of the classic bombs in gaming.

2. Winds of Thunder

Although short lived, the variety of these super weapons and the sheer relief when you press that button make these more welcome than a couple of porn stars at Charlie Sheen's house.

1. Kyūkyoku Tiger

This is just an awesome sight, and is EXACTLY what you want to see from a smart bomb. Massive rings of fire cause untold devastation to all that make contact, and the satisfying rumble leaves no doubt that you've dropped one (a bomb that is). This is a big bang. This is things blowing up. This is what real men want to see. Kablooooooooey,



Parodius ©1992 Konami, Super Star Soldier ©1990 Hudson Soft/Inter State/Kaneko, Tatsujin ©1992 Taito/Toaplan, Winds of Thunder ©1993 Hudson Soft/Red, Kyukyoku Tiger ©1989 Taito

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